

# Women In Spirit and Flesh

## Follow Me

**My curriculum for infant faith formation is a lot like day camp. We sing songs and go on field trips.**

By [Monica A. Coleman](#), August 01, 2013

*Note: This article is part of a special Patheos Symposium, [Passing on the Faith: Teaching the Next Generation](#). [Read more perspectives here](#).*

My daughter has been crawling for three months. Our outings to the six a.m. worship service with our faith community have changed. We used to hold her in our arms, gently rocking or nursing her to sleep during the spoken message. Now, we find space on the carpet between the chairs and let her crawl to her heart's delight, intervening for safety and sound.

One Sunday, while the minister prayed, my ten-month-old paused and assumed a new prayer position. Hands in front of face, forehead to ground, kneeling, then rising. She had just seen my Muslim friend pray in this manner the previous evening when we had Ramadan's Iftar dinner at her home. Cuddly ensconced in the baby carrier on my chest, my daughter had watched, remembered, and then later emulated.

We did not take her to Iftar with the idea that we were doing interreligious education on an infant-almost-toddler. We celebrated religious ritual with our friends. She came with us. Or more aptly, she followed.

"Follow me."

Over and over again, Jesus asks the men and women he meets to follow him. This is how they become disciples.

Both my partner and I have been shaped by evangelical Christian campus organizations that stress the practice of discipleship. Our late teen years and early twenties were shaped by forming close relationships with individuals slightly older than us, sharing our feelings and following their examples. We quickly learned to become a similar kind of faith mentor for someone else. We flourished under the structure and teaching of people we trusted.

I don't know that we thought to disciple our infant. We thought that we wanted to expose her to what we find holy.

For grace, we sing a simple song that is performed in our faith community: [God is real, God is magnificent, God is light, God is love](#). Even when we say the words, she begins to clap.

We place her between our legs and read her [The Gnostic Bible](#) (then [Brown Bear, Brown Bear](#)).

We bring her to worship with us. Even when there is a childcare option, we keep her in the sanctuary. We want her to hear the music, the message, the prayers.

In the kitchen, in her room, and as we stroll, I sing songs of my faith to her. They range from the social justice anthems of [Sweet Honey in the Rock](#), to "This little light of mine," to the spirituals of my African

American heritage like "[Go Down Moses](#)."

I let the older deaconesses and stewardesses hold her and play with the bows on her dresses during long services in sweltering black churches.

We have also taken her to West African drum circles in the park and reggae concerts in the arena.

As a progressive Christian, I cannot imagine faith formation without being interreligious. Our friends and family are religiously diverse. As we spend time with them, our daughter may follow them.

My daughter's infancy is teaching me about faith formation. I have ideas about God. Lots of them. I write, teach, and preach about them for a living. I am eager to tell her what mainstream ideas she should reject; I look forward to sharing my favorite influences with her. Her inability to speak elaborate language or complex argument reminds me that my own formation wasn't verbal. It involved my grandmother preparing Communion wafers, the sounds of Negro spirituals, the songs of Vacation Bible School. I want my child to know about Christianity, but I want her to love God and church more. I want to put our faith in her heart and her bones. I want her to return to it when she gets lost.

So my curriculum for infant faith formation is a lot like day camp. We sing songs and go on field trips. We sing the songs that shape our faith, culture, and values. In our family, loving God, pursuing justice, and cultivating African American culture are intertwined. We go to church, Iftar, drumming events, concerts, and the homes of our friends. In this way, I hope that my daughter is able to find God in the many places that I do.

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*Coleman's column, "Women In Spirit and Flesh," is published every other Tuesday on the [Progressive Christian portal](#). Subscribe via [email](#) or [RSS](#).*